

Message Text

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INFO AMEOBASSY DUBLIN

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SUBJECT: VANGUARD AND UPNI SEEK TALKS WITH OFFICIAL UNIONISTS

REF: (A) 1976 BELFAST 428 (B) 1976 BELFAST 420

1. PRESS REVEALED JANUARY 4 VANGUARD UNIONISTS AND UNIONIST PARTY NORTHERN IRELAND (UPNI) MAKING JOINT APPROACH TO HARRY WEST, LEADER OF OFFICIAL UNIONIST PARTY SEEKING EXPLORATORY TALKS TOWARD ACHIEVING DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT FOR PROVINCE. IT APPEARS WILLIAM CRAIG AND ANNE DICKSON, BRIAN FAULKNER'S SUCCESSOR AS LEADER UPNI, HAVE MET OCCASIONALLY SINCE OCTOBER. THERE INITIAL HOSTILE REACTION TO INVITATION FROM OTHER LEGS OF UNITED ULSTER UNIONIST COALITION (UUUC), PAISLEY'S DEMOCRATIC UNIONIST PARTY AND BAIRD'S UNITED ULSTER UNIONIST MOVEMENT. OFFICIAL UNIONISTS HAVE NOT YET RESPONDED TO PROPOSAL.

2. FOUR DEVELOPMENTS HAVE PROVIDED MILD STIMULUS LOCALLY FOR RESUMPTION NORTHERN IRELAND DEVOLUTION DEBATE: (A) IN MID-DECEMBER JIM MOLYNEAUX, LEADER OF UUUC PARLIAMENTARY GROUP UNCLASSIFIED

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SUGGESTED A TWO-TIER SYSTEM OF DEVOLVED GOVERNMENT FOR PROVINCE BEGINNING WITH ADMINISTRATIVE FUNCTIONS AND DEFERRING QUESTION OF LEGISLATIVE ATTRIBUTIONS. MOLYNEAUX HAS BEEN AWAY FROM PROVINCE SINCE PARLIAMENT RECESSED AND CONGEN CANNOT OBTAIN AMPLIFICATION OF PROPOSAL UNTIL HIS RETURN MID-JANUARY. (B) LOCAL COUNCIL ELECTIONS ARE SCHEDULED FOR MAY AND THERE BEGINNING TO BE DISCUSSION ABOUT ATTRIBUTIONS AND CANDIDATES. THERE SOME

SPECULATION THAT PEACE PEOPLE CONSIDERING PARTICIPATION IN THESE ELECTIONS. (C) RESTLESSNESS WITHIN POLITICAL PARTIES, MOST EVIDENT IN SOCIAL DEMOCRAT AND LABOUR PARTY (SDLP, REFTELS), IS PERSISTENT AND GROWING. (D) ROMAN CATHOLIC BISHOP OF ARDAGH AND CONMACNOIS, CAHAL DALY SPEAKING AT LONGFORD IN REPUBLIC JANUARY 1 DESCRIBED NORTHERN IRELAND AS POTENTIALLY "ONE OF BRITAIN' S GREATEST HISTORIC FAILURES." HE BLAMED LACK OF INITIATIVE SINCE 1973 AND "MESSY MIX OF DIRECT RULE" FOR FRAGMENTING POLITICAL PARTIES AND SUSTAINING PARAMILITARIES. THIS SPEECH WIDELY REPORTED AND SUBJECT CONSIDERABLE DISCUSSION IN NORTH, ESPECIALLY SINCE IT SEEMED BE INDIRECTLY SUPPORTING SDLP.

3. DESPITE GENERALLY FAVORABLE IMPRESSION MADE LOCALLY BY NEW NORTHERN IRELAND TEAM, PARTICULARLY SECRETARY OF STATE MASON CRITICISM OF DIRECT RULE PERSISTS AGAINST BACKDROP OF CONTINUING VIOLENCE IN PROVINCE. THERE WERE 296 PEOPLE KILLED AND NEARLY 3000 INJURED IN TERRORIST-RELATED ACTIONS IN 1976, WITH 850 BOMBINGS THE SECOND BLOODIEST AND MOST EXPLOSIVE YEAR OF THE TROUBLES. SO FAR THIS NEW YEAR A SOLDIER HAS BEEN SHOT AND KILLED, AND AN 18 MONTH OLD CHILD WAS KILLED IN A CAR BOMB EXPLOSION. THERE HAVE ALSO BEEN SEVERAL BOMBS ALREADY THIS YEAR, MOSTLY IN THE BELFAST SUBURB OF DUNMURRY. JANUARY 4 THE ULSTER VOLUNTEER FORCE ANNOUNCED THAT IT HAD ENDED ITS YEAR-OLD CEASEFIRE AND WAS TAKING ACTION AGAINST CONTRACTORS WHO DID PRISON WORK AND SO ASSISTED IN TERMINATING SPECIAL CATEGORY STATUS.SPICER

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